

Vale District Bureau of Land Management
Turnbull Mountain Fence Construction
Environmental Assessment
EA No. OR-030-00-013

I. PURPOSE AND NEED

A. Background

Steve Russell is authorized to graze 531 head of cattle within Juniper Mountain, Sand Basin, and Slaten pastures (Frying Pan Area of Use) of Turnbull Allotment (00303) between 4/1 and 10/31 annually in accordance with a rangeline agreement implemented in 1995 (figure 1). Within that grazing schedule, a three year deferred rotation grazing schedule is defined for Frying Pan Area of Use.

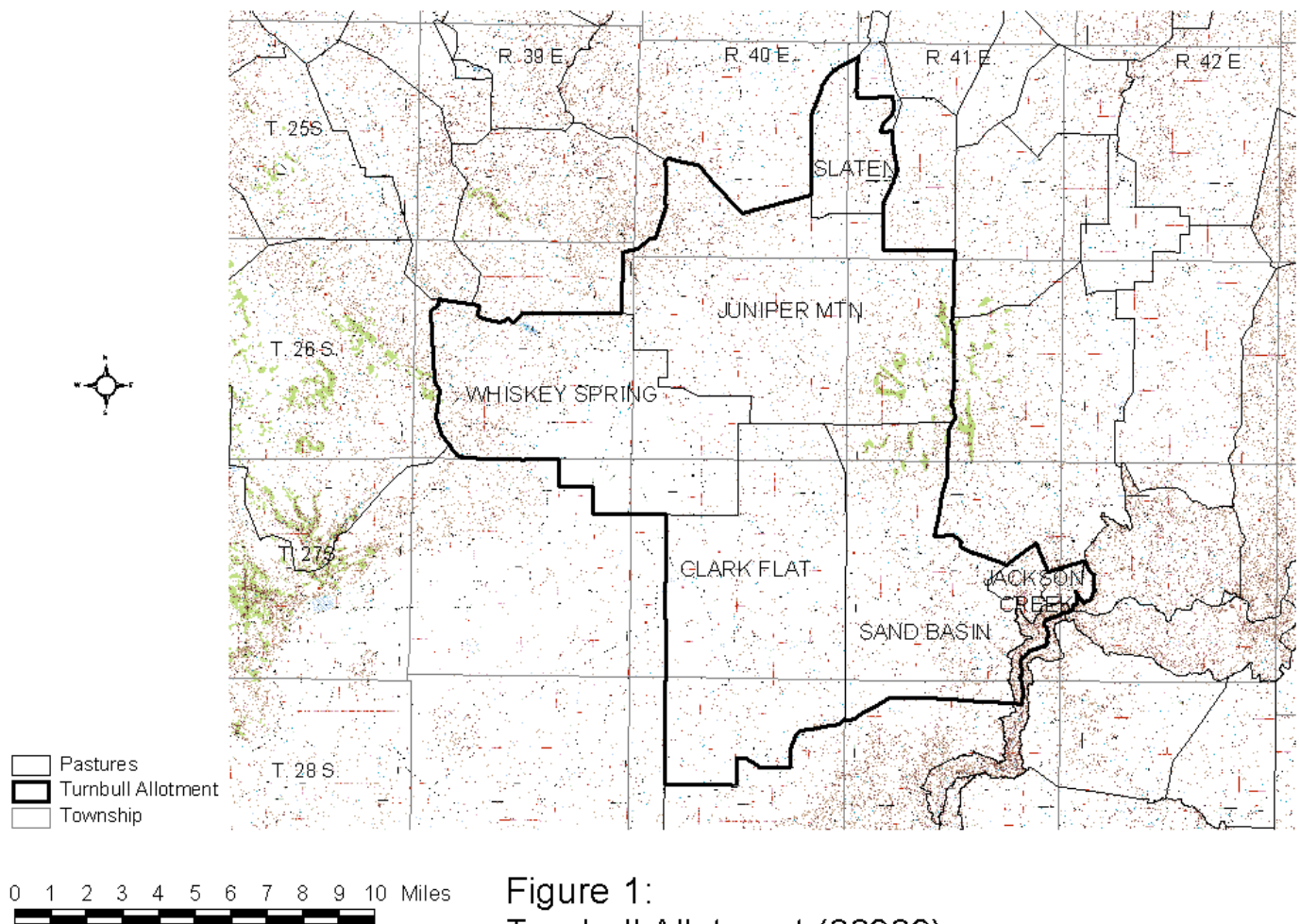


Figure 1:
Turnbull Allotment (00303)
T. 25-26-27-28 S., R. 39-40-41 E., W.M.

B. Purpose and Need

Existing fences recorded in BLM files are not inclusive of many of those on site within Turnbull Allotment. Specifically, BLM records in GIS pasture coverage of Juniper Mountain Pasture do not identify a number of fences adjacent to the Frying Pan private land nor a 2.25 mile fenceline in the western portion of the pasture which partially encloses private and public land including Dowell Reservoir and a portion of Road Canyon (Figure 2). The livestock operator has requested authorization to construct approximately 0.25 miles of fence which when combined with topographic features which limit livestock movement and the above identified 2.25 miles of fence would complete the enclosure of Dowell Pasture. This created pasture would be approximately 1500 acres of which an estimated 760 acres is private and the remainder is public domain.

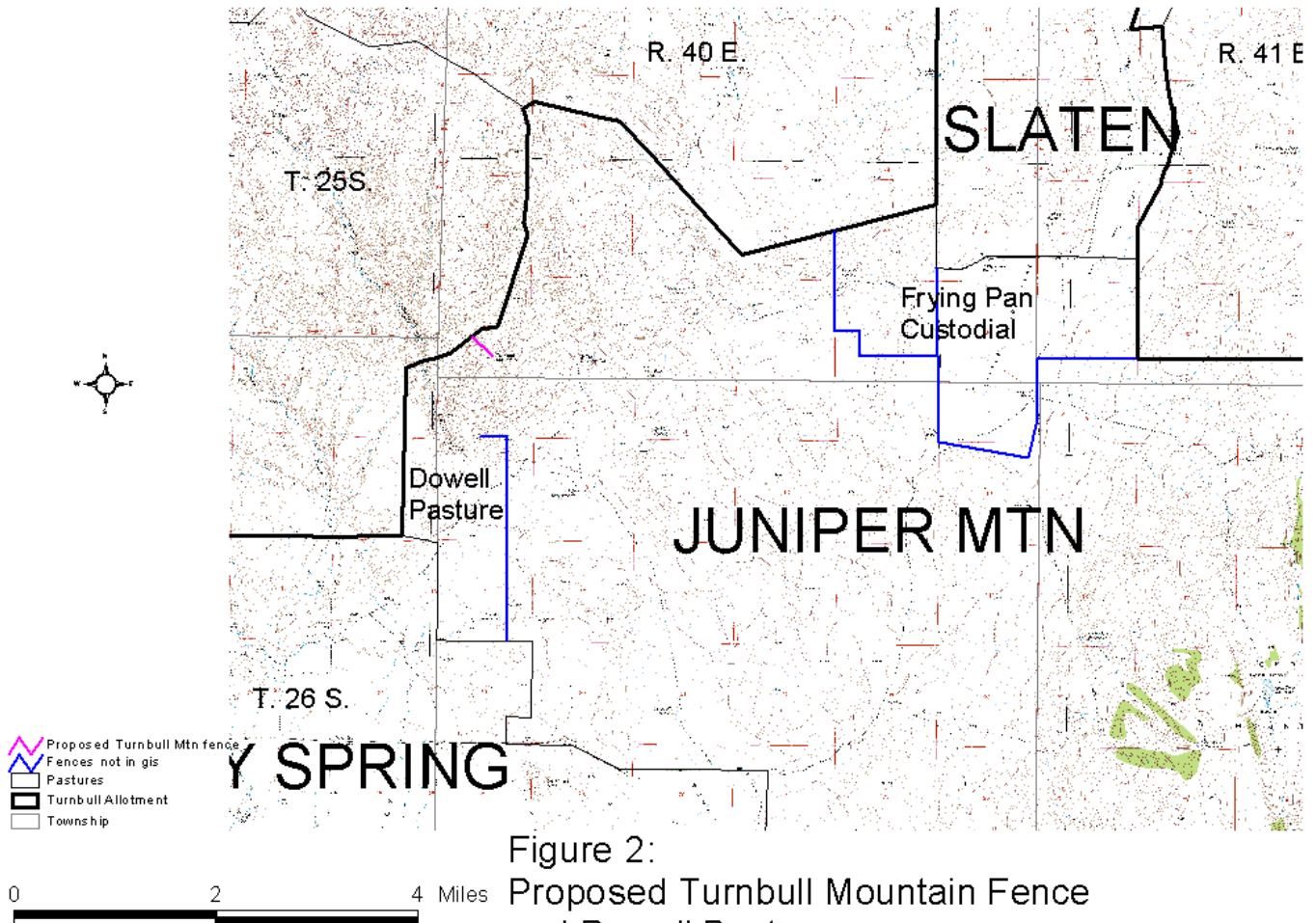


Figure 2:
Proposed Turnbull Mountain Fence
and Dowell Pasture
T. 25-26 S., R. 39-40 E., W.M.

II. CONSISTENCY WITH LAND USE PLANS

Fence construction and maintenance to provide barriers to livestock movement is fully consistent with decisions in the Northern Malheur Management Framework Plan dated March 14, 1983, the Southern Malheur Rangeland Program Summary dated January 1984, the Malheur County Land Use Plan, and BLM policy.

III. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

Approximately 0.25 miles of four-strand barbed wire fence would be constructed within the Juniper Mountain Pasture of Turnbull Allotment (T. 25S., R. 40 E., W.M. Section 31 SW 1/4) between the existing Tiffin Division Fence (JDR 3737) and rocky slopes on the northwest flank of Turnbull Mountain. Soil and vegetation disturbance associated with fence construction would be limited to the immediate vicinity of rock cribs or other appropriate bracing construction and brush removal in the immediate line of wire placement.

Livestock grazing within the created Dowell Pasture would be managed independent from the established schedule in Frying Pan Area of Use. Dowell Pasture would be managed as a special use pasture with rest or deferment of use during the active growing season (5/1 to 7/15) occurring in two of every three years so long as unacceptable impacts to public land resources are not identified. The minimal acreage removed from Juniper Mountain Pasture would require no change in scheduled season of use of that pasture, though the total permitted AUM's used by Steve Russell would not increase with the removal of Dowell Pasture from Juniper Mountain Pasture. Though the created Dowell Pasture is not immediately adjacent to Cold Springs Wild Horse Management Area (HMA), recent history of wild horse movement outside the HMA and into Road Canyon, especially during severe winters, would preclude the grazing of domestic horses within Dowell Pasture.

B. No Action Alternative

Livestock management within Juniper Mountain Pasture of Turnbull Allotment would continue as planned in the 1995 rangeline agreement. Though the existing 2.25 mile fence would remain providing a partial barrier to livestock movement between private land in the vicinity of Dowell Reservoir and the remainder of Juniper Mountain Pasture, all public land adjacent to this private land within the currently recognized Juniper Mountain Pasture would be grazed as scheduled in the three year deferred rotation system.

IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Vegetation

Vegetation in Turnbull Allotment consists of steppe shrub plant communities dominated by sagebrush species and bunchgrasses. The vegetation type which covers the majority of the allotments is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata ssp wyomingensis*) with an understory of perennial grass species, primarily Bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa sandbergii*), Thurber's needlegrass (*Stipa*

thurberiana), basin wildrye (*Elymus cinereus*) and sparse cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*).

B. Noxious Weeds

Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), an aggressive biennial, dominates a small acreage at a number of locations within the allotment. Whitetop or hoary cress (*Cardaria spp.*), another perennial noxious weed is also present, especially adjacent to roads and other routes of seed distribution and is the dominant vegetation on private land in the McHarque Area of Use immediately to the southwest of Dowell Reservoir. Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*), an aggressive annual grass, is present at limited sites with clay layers present in the soil.

C. Livestock Grazing

Turnbull is a community allotment with two livestock operators permitted to graze animals within the two areas of use. Steve Russell is authorized to graze 531 head of cattle within the Frying Pan Area of Use for 3736 AUM's of use between 4/1 and 10/31 annually. Additionally, he is authorized to graze horses in the Jackson Creek Pasture between 11/1 and 1/31 annually for 91 AUM's of use and within custodial pastures for 84 AUM's of use.

Ronald Sutphin is authorized to graze 357 head of cattle within the McHargue Area of Use for 2517 AUM's of use between 4/1 and 10/31. Additionally he is authorized to graze 105 head of cattle in Whiskey Springs Pasture for 425 AUM's of use between 7/1 and 10/31 annually.

D. Wildlife

The proposed project area for the construction of Turnbull Mountain fence is within year-long range for mule deer and pronghorn antelope. Elk also are present seasonally. Other wildlife species found in the area include neotropical migratory song birds, small mammals and reptiles. Sage grouse are not known to be present in adjacent areas with the nearest known lek site located 3.8 miles north and an additional site located a similar distance southwest.

Within the immediate area of the proposed project are no known wildlife species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

E. Recreation and Visual Resources

Dispersed outdoor recreation in the proposed project area consists primarily of off highway vehicle use and hunting of upland birds and big game animals. Some dispersed general sightseeing occurs. The project area is within a visual resource management Class IV area. The objective of Class IV is to provide for management activities that require major modification of the landscape. These management activities may dominate the view and become the focus of viewer attention. However, every effort should be made to minimize the impact of these projects by carefully locating activities, minimizing disturbance, and designing the projects to conform to the characteristic landscape.

G. Cultural Resources

There are no known or suspected cultural resources within the project area.

H. Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Plants

No plant species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are known to be present within the project area. No special status plant species are known or suspected within the immediate area.

I. Climate/Topography

The project area is in rolling hills and steep talus slopes where the elevation above sea level ranges from 4800 feet at the junction with Tiffin Division Fence to 5200 feet at the summit of Turnbull Mountain. Semi desert shrub steep vegetation communities result from cold winters and hot dry summers. The long term average annual precipitation is twelve inches. Precipitation occurs primarily as snow fall during the winter with occasional mid summer thunder storms.

J. Wild Horse and Burro

Cold Springs HMA is located two miles north of the project area and across two fencelines. Saddle Butte HMA is located 13 miles south of the project area and across 3 fencelines.

K. Other Mandatory Elements

The following mandatory elements are either not present or would not be affected by the proposed action or alternatives:

1. Air Quality
2. Wild and Scenic Rivers
3. Native American Religious Concerns
4. Hazardous Wastes
5. Prime or Unique Farmlands
6. Wilderness Study Areas
7. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
8. Wetlands/Riparian, Flood Plains
9. Environmental Justice

V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Proposed Action

1. Vegetation

Fence construction would minimally increase traffic on existing roads and impacts to soil and

vegetation resources on the route chosen to transport material. Minor disturbance of vegetation would occur within the 0.25 mile route of the fence as shrubs are clipped. Additional traffic resulting from maintenance activities would also minimally impact vegetation and soil resources. Livestock impacts to vegetation would not differ from that which has occurred in previous years since the proposed fence is upslope from the typical areas of livestock use within the created pasture and the fence would serve only as a final barrier to incidental livestock movement.

2. Noxious weeds

Traffic and ground disturbance during construction and maintenance would add additional risk for dispersal of weed seed along roads and routes of access as well as the area of project construction, providing sites for weed establishment.

3. Livestock Grazing

Flexibility for special management of small groups of cattle would be provided by the recognition of the 1500 acre Dowell Pasture. A portion of Steve Russell's authorized grazing use within Turnbull Allotment amounting to 50 AUM's of grazing authorization (15 acres per AUM and 740 acres PD) would be managed within Dowell Pasture under special stipulations and separate from the established grazing schedule for Frying Pan Area of Use. As a result, a total of 84 AUM's held by this operator would continue to be managed within custodial pastures annually, 91 AUM's of use would continue to be managed under special stipulations within Jackson Creek Pasture between 11/1 and 1/31 annually, 50 AUM's would be managed under special stipulations as identified above in Dowell Pasture, and 3686 AUM's would be managed in Frying Pan Area of Use in accordance with the 1995 rangeline agreement.

4. Soils/Watershed

Impacts to soils and watershed values would be minimally changed from those which have occurred in recent years similar to impacts to vegetation identified above.

5. Wildlife

Negative impacts to wildlife would not occur as a result of constructing the proposed fence and management of livestock in a special use pasture as identified. The fence would be constructed in accordance with BLM policy so as to provide for wildlife passage.

6. Recreation and Visual Resources

Recreation values would be unchanged by the proposed action. Visual impacts of the proposed four-strand barbed wire fence would be consistent with objectives for Class IV management. Visual impacts for disturbance of vegetation and soil resources would be minimally changed from existing conditions.

7. Cultural Resources

Cultural resources would not be affected by the proposed action. Surveys would be conducted

to locate any unknown resources, and potential impacts would be mitigated by avoidance or cultural resource preservation, prior to surface disturbance.

8. T&E Plants

Special Status plant species would not be affected by the proposed action. Surveys would be conducted to locate any unknown special status plant sites and the fence would be located to mitigate potential negative impacts.

B. No Action Alternative

1. Vegetation

The no action alternative would not affect vegetation resources in ways other than are currently occurring.

2. Noxious weeds

The no action alternative would not change noxious weed distribution or dominance in ways other than are currently occurring.

3. Livestock Grazing

Livestock management in Juniper Mountain Pasture would continue as defined in the 1995 rangeline agreement, with the partial inclusion of lands adjacent to Dowell Reservoir.

4. Soils/Watershed

The no action alternative would not affect soils or watershed values in ways other than is currently occurring.

5. Wildlife

Wildlife habitat values would remain unchanged with no additional direct impacts to wildlife species.

6. Recreation and Visual Resources

The no action alternative would not affect recreation or visual resources.

7. Cultural Resources

The no action alternative would not affect cultural resources.

8. T & E Plant Species

The no action alternative would not affect T&E plant species.

VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Steve Russell, livestock operator Turnbull Allotment, Frying Pan Area of Use
Ronald Sutphin, livestock operator Turnbull Allotment, McHargue Area of Use
Walt Van Dyke, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

VII. LIST OF PREPARERS/REVIEWERS

Steve Christensen	Rangeland Management Specialist
Randy Eyre	Rangeland Management Specialist
Ron Rembowski	Rangeland Management Specialist
Tom Hilken	Rangeland Management Specialist; Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Jim Johnson	Wild Horse Specialist
Bob Alward	Outdoor Recreation Planner
Jean Findley	Botanist
Diane Pritchard	Archaeologist
Shaney Rockefeller	Hydrologist/Soil Scientist
Al Bammann	Wildlife Biologist
Lynne Silva	Range Technician, Weeds
Tom Dabbs	Multi Resources Staff Supervisor
Roy Masinton	Field Manager, Malheur Resource Area

XII. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION REPORT

Finding of No Significant Impact / Decision Record

On the basis of the information contained in this Environmental Assessment and all other information available, it is my determination that the proposed action is in conformance with the land use plan for Malheur Resource Area and does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and that an EIS is not required. It is my decision to implement the proposed action described in this EA (OR-030-00-013).

s/ Roy L. Masinton
Field Manager
Malheur Resource Area

10/17/00
Date